

“The Mission of God”

Matthew 4:12-23

January 27, 2019

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Pastor Andy Kinsey

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you catch people.’”

- Matthew 4:19

Prayer of Preparation

O Lord, may we hear your voice to follow your Son Jesus Christ. In the power of your Spirit, may we respond and give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Message

It is good to be back with you. I appreciated a little time away following the Christmas season. To be sure, I had a good trip to England where I am now involved in a special program of study, but I am glad to be home!

Getting off the plane last week, however, was indeed a wakeup call, a true shock to the system! Wow! But hey, it’s January in Indiana, right? I know the weather has been rough, even to get to church!

But speaking of wakeup calls, did you hear the little joke about wakeup calls from the comedian Garry Shandling? Garry Shandling once commented on the phenomenon of wakeup calls in hotels. He says, “Here’s a little tip from one who has traveled a great-deal: Wake up calls are one of the worsts ways to wake up. The phone rings. It’s loud. You can’t turn it down. And it’s annoying.”

“So what do I do? I leave the number of the room next to me with the person at the check in desk; and then, in the morning, when I hear the phone ring next door, I listen. I get kind of quiet. And then I hear a guy yell, ‘What are you calling me for?’ Then I get up and take a shower. It’s great.”¹

Wakeup calls! Not too many of us like to wakeup calls. And yet, at the heart of the gospel is a wakeup call!

¹ *That’s Really Funny!* (Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2000), 163.

And it is a wakeup call that comes to us at all times of the day and in a wide variety of places and circumstances. It comes to folks at all stages of life and when we may least expect it. It comes when we are up and when we are down. It comes when we are busy and we are not. It comes whether we like it or not.

It comes when Jesus and says, “Follow me. And I will make you catch people” (Matthew 4:19). Christ’s wakeup call!

I can’t remember where I was when Ellsworth Kallas, a long-time Methodist preacher, was speaking, but he made a statement that I have not forgotten. He said, “There is only one person in this world you will have to pay attention to, as to whether you answer his call: and that’s Jesus.” At some point you will need to decide, or not decide, if you will take Jesus’ call, that is, to respond to his invitation to participate in his mission. That’s the first step in being a disciple.

In the Jewish tradition, and throughout history, disciples were those who learned from a teacher or a mentor. That’s what the word disciple means, after all: learner, apprentice. Jesus is looking for people who will learn from him.

In our passage today, Jesus invites four fishermen to follow him and not only to follow but to learn from him about his mission *to catch people up in what God is doing*.

That’s what the mission is going to be about: as the disciples go about their lives, they are relate to others in a way that continues what Jesus was doing – teaching, preaching, healing, caring, loving, forgiving.

It is a mission that has its roots, of course, in Israel: to be a light unto the nations (Isaiah 49:6), but it is also has its roots in the very fabric of creation, to be a life-giving force in all the world (Genesis 1:26-2:4).

Mission of God

Hence, the phrase the mission of God!² That’s a big and loaded phrase – the mission of God – but if I can invite you to overhear an ongoing conversation in the life of the church, it is the conversation about what it means to be part of *the mission of God*.

² See Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 23.

The word mission, of course, does not appear in the Bible. Rather, the word we translate as mission is “to send, or to go out.”

In Luke’s Gospel, for example, Jesus sends out 70 of followers and tells them to preach and heal (Luke 10:1-11). And at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells the eleven to go and teach and baptize all nations (Matthew 28:16-20). That’s the mission. And at the end of John’s Gospel, Jesus talks about the mission of God in the following way, when he says, “As the Father has sent me into the world, so I send you” (John 20:21).

The point is that we are not just to sit around and look good, but to go out and do good, to be part of the kingdom-mission.

Indeed, one of the main points about the whole mission of God is the saying that it is not so much that the church has a mission – mission statements and so forth, but that God’s mission has a church!

God’s mission happens to have us to be the bearers of that mission! Folks like you and me – men, women – called to follow after this Jesus, to participate in God’s mission: to catch others in the nets of God’s mercy.³

Sounds big, doesn’t it? The mission of God! It is! It is big, it’s very big, but it is also *very personal*: it is about whether *you* and *I* will be part of it and relate to the One who calls us.

Vocabulary of Mission

Now perhaps the phrase mission of God may be new to you. It is a phrase that focuses on who God is and what God is doing. It is a phrase that points to the character of God and to the actions of God, whereas other words in the vocabulary of mission – words like mission-shaped, missionary, missions – tend to focus on what we do.

Lately, however, a new word has also appeared and that is the word *missional*. Over the next year, all UM churches in Indiana are supposed to become *missional*. I am not sure what that really means, but in a recent review I wrote about the word *missional*, and I noted that it is a word that has been so overused that it has lost its true force.

That’s sad because it is a word that points to the importance of relationships.

³ Ibid., 23.

There are other words, of course, that we have used to describe mission. For example, we send *missionaries* overseas to spread the gospel, and in on our *mission's team*, we typically provide financial support to those who serve Christ. And we know that if the church is truly to be the church, it will need to be a *mission-shaped church*; it will look like a community in mission in all that it does.

But missional: I believe that missional is about being the kind of persons who relate to others in Christ's name and who seek to invite others into a relationship with Christ, not in a top-down way, but inviting, supporting.

To be missional is what Jesus is wanting Peter and Andrew and James and John to be: relating to others, preaching, healing, and, yes, *reproducing the mission by catching people*. The mission of God is to catch people in the nets of Jesus' mercy.

Job Description

That means that when *we* sign up to follow Jesus we take up a new job description. For the first thing that we realize about this new job is that when we follow Jesus, we are not following some idea or theory, but God's own Son, begotten of the Father, born of the Spirit. We are following an actual person who relates to us and gives and shares his life with us. We follow Jesus, and not some idea of Jesus.

The second thing we learn about this new job is that we are to reproduce the mission by living and loving in such a way that others will want to join us. Our job is to get others involved, to share the gospel with others, not keep it to ourselves.

Go and catch others! Follow Jesus. Two-point job description. Sound easy?

If you were to go on an interview, how will you answer?

As I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon, I was in England a couple weeks ago, and while there, I attended a small Methodist Church, as are most Methodist congregations are in England, and I attended on the Sunday when many churches around the world were celebrating baptismal renewal.

I found the folks incredibly kind. We shared together the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer, we sang several of the hymns of Charles Wesley, we celebrated Holy Communion.

But I also realized that Methodism in England right now is in dire straight. There is no reproduction of disciples, hardly any evangelism. In fact, I did not detect much urgency to share with others what John Wesley called the glad tidings of salvation. There was little, if any, of what I would call missional or evangelistic vitality. And what happens when a species no longer reproduces? That's problem.

But there's more. I know years ago the famous Willow Creek Church near Chicago did an internal study that indicated that it was not really making disciples. The study indicated that they were not going down the right track – too much entertainment, too few people doing too much of the ministry. Here the problem was not so much reproduction but the inability to engage in truly following Jesus.⁴

Follow...catch!

It all sounds so simple, doesn't it? But again, let me ask: do we really know what it means to be a disciple? Do you really know Jesus? In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, do you follow Jesus or your idea of Jesus? Or do you want Jesus to follow you?

In our church when we invite persons to join, we ask them: will you participate in God's mission by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service and witness?

The first disciples dropped their occupations in the fishing industry when Jesus called them; they all were involved in a highly successful business. They were doing well. But now Jesus was expanding that business in ways that they couldn't imagine.⁵

Many throughout history have done the same, walking away from jobs of high earnings for the insecurity of pastoring, teaching, becoming a chaplain in a prison, being a monk or a priest or a missionary.

Millions of Christians on a regular basis give up practices and attitudes and occupations and jobs to follow, to become part of Jesus portable community in the world. And the only way I can come to grips with this kind of change in people's lives is *Jesus himself*.⁶

⁴ See *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Grand Rapids: Reveal, 2007).

⁵ N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone – Part One* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

Just as the disciples heard his voice and felt his presence some 2000 years ago, so people still do today, sometimes as a whisper, sometimes as a shout, sometimes as a wakeup call in the night (or morning), sometimes as a low ache that won't go away, or sometimes dramatically, suddenly, and powerfully.

However it may happen, *Jesus* has ways of getting through, Christ has ways of making his presence known. There is a visible change in behavior, habits, loyalties, priorities.

Now, to be sure, we cannot always know where this change is going to lead us, but we can be sure that Christ will go with us.

I am pretty sure Peter, James, and John and Andrew had no idea where their lives would end that day on the Sea of Galilee.

And I am pretty sure we don't either.

That's how big the mission of God is!

The Holy Spirit blows where it wills!

The Spirit nudges us and, hopefully, we hear Christ's voice, calling us and waking us up to follow him, to give our lives over to him.

May it be so! Amen.